

Can't Fight This Feeling by kittenCorrosion

Series: [the name of the game \(stranger teens 2.0\) \[4\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Awkward Cute, F/M, First Love, Fluff, It's pure fluff, Mileven, but he tries his best, el is saavy and cute wow, happy mileven day, it's been 84 years since i've posted anything sorry, mike is kind of slow sometimes, star wars references aayy, summary is trash, these kids are the best, this is completely sappy like it will give you a cavity

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Summary:

It's just another usual day, reading and hanging out together. He doesn't expect end up confessing his love to her, but maybe it's better that way.

She always knows what to say.

Can't Fight This Feeling

Author's Note:

i don't love this 100% but it's cute and makes me happy.

it's 3/15 aka mileven day! thanks kayla (milheavens) for starting the best holiday ever.

hope you guys like it. <3

1986

“In vain I have struggled.”

El's voice was quiet but sure, her head tucked into Mike's shoulder as she held the book in front of her. They were squished onto his bed, the door of the room open, the January sunshine warm despite the chill outside. It was Saturday and El was over at the Wheeler's, having escaped the cabin for the day since Hop was on weekend duty and didn't love leaving her alone if he could help it. The Wheeler house was ideal since El liked to be near Mike and Hop liked her to be near adult supervision. And she always came home fed.

“It will not do. My feelings will not be re—” Her voice faltered and she squinted. “Re... repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ___”

She stopped and stared at the word, frowning. Admittedly, Jane Austen wasn't the best book for a beginner but she was learning fast, her usual quiet demeanor becoming more of a choice and less of a requirement as her vocabulary improved.

“Ardently,” Mike supplied, looking over from his own tattered paperback of the Hobbit.

“A-Ardent... ardently,” her foot nudged his calf in thanks. “How ardent-ly I admire and love you.”

They were six months into their first year of high school and things were finally... normal. If you could call it that. His parents (when they were there) were used to seeing El now, first as part of his conglomeration of friends that invaded the basement several times a week and then, after a month or so, by herself, disappearing up to his room or both of them going down the basement.

You could hear them laughing as he showed her his D&D binder and explained lore or watched a movie or, most commonly, did homework. Her workload wasn't unusually large but it was more than the workbooks Hop had given her during her year in the cabin and it would have overwhelmed her if she didn't have such patient tutors. Dustin sometimes helped with their English Comp homework or Lucas with Geography, but Mike was her go-to, since he was seemed to know everything.

And he *always* had time for her.

"What's 'ardently'? And 'admire'?" she asked, the usual curious lilt in her voice.

He lowered his book and looked over at her. Any time she asked a question her eyebrows scrunched together and it was one of his favorite things. He hid a smile at her cute expression and tried to think of good definitions that she would understand.

"Admire is like, liking someone, but more formally? It's thinking they're cool, but fancy talk I guess. I think in that book it means like-like," he squinted at her copy of *Pride & Prejudice*. "Ardently just means a lot. So he's saying he likes her a lot."

"He says he loves her," she said in confusion.

"Is that Mr. Darcy?" He reached for her paperback and pulled it closer.

"Yes."

A pause as he scanned the paragraph.

"He's saying a lot of nice things to her but he's saying them really..." he frowned, "...badly. I know it's hard to tell but he's being really

rude.”

El frowned. “So he doesn’t love her?”

“No, he does it’s just... I mean, that’s the whole story, El. They have to figure it out because it’s kind of messy and difficult. Darcy says things he doesn’t mean because of his prejudice and Elizabeth gets angry because of her pride but they actually love each other and in the end—”

“Don’t tell me!” She shrieked, grabbing the nearest pillow and shoving it over his face to keep him from spoiling the ending.

He spluttered in surprise as the pillow smacked him in the face, trying to shove the soft cushion out of his mouth. It startled him so much he flinched back, almost falling off the edge of the bed as he flailed. She giggled, catching him her mind and steadying him with a hand before he fell.

With a grunt she pulled him, hard, so hard he halfway toppled onto her, their limbs tangling as she laughed louder, trying to help him move. He paused and looked down at her, his hands on either side of her head, taking in her dancing eyes and giggly smile, feeling something heat up his lungs, his whole chest suddenly an inferno.

How is she so amazing? He blinked, eyes fond. *I’m seriously never going to believe she’s here now. It’s too awesome.*

“Mike?”

Her voice was lower, more of a gasp of air, and her hands were around his neck, pulling him down, his body half on her, their chests touching. Suddenly he felt hot all over, torn between wanting to move off of her and never move again. His lips brushed hers, her breath warm and mingling with his as he—

“Hey, Mike, are you guys—”

He sprung off of her, jumping back off of the bed entirely and standing awkwardly, trying to lean casually against the side of it like he hadn’t just been half on top her. Nancy blinked, looking slightly grossed-out, eyes moving between her brother and El, who was still

sprawled on the bed, her paperback in her hand. The younger girl sat up and brushed at her hair, feeling a strange sense of guilt.

“What do you want, Nancy?” Mike snapped, face red. “I was—I mean, we were—”

“I don’t want to know, honestly.” She held up her hands, closing her eyes and shaking her head, not ready for that. “I was just wondering if you were still going to the arcade or not.”

“Um... maybe, Will hasn’t answered and Dustin doesn’t want to go if it’s just me and El so I don’t know yet.”

“No Lucas?” Nancy seemed confused.

“He’s busy, he and Max went to see a movie, I guess,” Mike shrugged.

“Oh. Jesus,” she rubbed her temple. “I swear it still feels like you’re nine years old and now you and all your little friends are dating—”

“We’re not—” His voice lowered like he didn’t want her to hear it. “El and I aren’t dating, okay?”

“Is that why you were on top of her, Mike?” Nancy was exasperated.

Somehow he turned an even brighter shade of red and next to him El blushed too, sensing that they had been caught doing something they shouldn’t have been doing. It was hard to tell what was “wrong” when everything she and Mike did felt right, the boundaries of what wasn’t okay a bit blurred by her innocence.

“I wasn’t—We weren’t—I mean, that’s not what—” he spluttered, eyes frantic.

“Calm down, it was a joke,” his sister rolled her eyes. “Okay well, anyways, if you do decide to go Mom wants me to give you a ride because it’s like negative twenty out and she doesn’t want you riding your bike and getting frostbite. She’s busy sewing Holly’s costume for her ballet recital and can’t be disturbed or something, I don’t know...”

“Okay, whatever,” he muttered, still sour about being interrupted.

"I'm just doing homework in my room. Let me know."

El spoke up then, sitting up all the way and giving Nancy a rare smile. She liked Mike's sister, she was pretty and tough and always said things that made Mike turn that pretty shade of pink. Sometimes she would touch El's hair really gently, brushing it with her fingers, and every now and then would take her into the bathroom and put some pretty clips in it for fun and talk about things like makeup and dresses and stuff she didn't really talk about with Hopper or Mike or even Max.

She liked having a sister again.

"Thank you, Nancy," she said quietly.

"No worries," Nancy smiled back. "Just don't... let Mom catch you like that. She thinks you guys are still babies and would lose her mind if she thought you were even like... kissing."

"Nancy," Mike warned.

His sister smiled teasingly and turned, leaving the door wide open behind her and disappearing into her room next door. Mike deflated, sitting back on the edge of the bed with a groan, wanting to pretend like that hadn't happened. She had been right though, if it had been his mom...

"Sorry, El," he blurted.

She blinked at him. "Why?"

"Um..." he realized he didn't really have an explanation.

They didn't really... do things. He didn't even know where to start with any of that even though he wasn't *clueless*, he heard things at school and on TV. He was pretty sure she wouldn't understand anyways, but they did like to kiss and lately the kisses had been getting... longer. It was kind of weird but nice and he figured as long as he went along with what she wanted it would be okay.

He was terrified of making her uncomfortable. Especially since they weren't... *dating*. That was another thing he just hadn't got around to

explaining, and one he didn't feel like he needed to. What they had was enough, it didn't *need* a label.

But that? Having his sister walk in right *then*? He wanted to die and assumed she felt the same way, but it seemed like she didn't quite understand what he meant.

"Um, just cause... like... that was really awkward? I mean, she didn't knock but I guess the door was open—"

"Oh, it was bad? What we were doing?" Her brow furrowed. "Not appropriate?" That was a word he'd taught her specifically for moments like these.

"Maybe... a bit, but that was my fault."

"It's okay. I don't mind," she shrugged, honestly, moving past the encounter without a care.

Her hand pulled him down onto the bed again and she snuggled back into his side, picking her book up, seeming unconcerned with what had just happened. His book had ended up on the floor and he realized he wouldn't be able to pick it up without disturbing her, which he wasn't willing to do when she looked so comfortable, her breath warm on his shoulder. Oh well. He could wait.

She was reading the next few lines silently. It had been his idea for her to read out loud. It helped her learn pronunciation and the words just seemed to stick better when she said them verbally. Now she scanned, trying to understand what he had been saying about Mr. Darcy loving Elizabeth but being rude. It didn't quite make sense.

"Why is he mean to her?"

"Because... honestly, I don't know. Mr. Darcy just kind of sucks at talking about how he feels, I think. So he's mean instead of being honest. It's... stupid."

"Why does he love her?"

"El," Mike resisted rolling his eyes. "That's the entire book. You already hit me in the face for trying to explain it."

She sighed, displeased with his answer. "But if he loves her... shouldn't he just be nice?"

"I mean, yeah, that helps," he stared off, thinking. "He could have just been straightforward about it but he called her ugly and then she said he was rude and he should have just apologized right away. But he didn't."

"Apologizing means you love someone?" She was looking up at him from his shoulder and he sighed, trying to think of a good explanation.

Of course she asks about emotions, he sighed, *she can't ask about something easy?*

It was another one of the myriad of questions she always had for him and he didn't think too deeply about the subject, just wanting to give her an answer that would make that sense and make him stop feeling so... weird.

"That's part of it, I guess. You want to be honest. But it's... it's when you care about someone more than anyone else, and like, you just want to be around them a lot. You like almost everything about them, but the kinds of things you don't think about with other people. Like their smile or their voice or they way they look at you..."

He trailed off, a sudden realization slamming into him like a ton of bricks.

I'm literally talking about how she makes me feel, he thought, almost immediately breaking out in a sweat.

He realized he had tensed and tried to relax, not wanting her to know that he was freaking out internally, still trying to understand what had just come out of his mouth. It's not like it was some ground-shaking personal epiphany or anything.

"So he likes those things about her?" El asked innocently, unaware of the fact that her very presence was suddenly making him want to jump out the window. But also he wanted to kiss her. Or maybe just

hold her and never let her go.

“Um, y-yeah. He should,” he answered shakily.

She was staring back at her book, not noticing his emotional turmoil, fixated on trying to understand how Mr. Darcy could be mean and nice at the same time, the oxymoron making her brow furrow. She didn’t notice Mike’s heart rate speed up, or the way his palms were suddenly sweating, snuggling further into his side, her leg wrapping cozily around his, her free hand absentmindedly playing with a lock of her hair.

She’s amazing and I always want to be around her, he tried to rationalize, *there’s no way it could be that. It’s just... it’s just how we are. And she likes to be around me. It’s not that... complicated.*

Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth were an entire novel’s worth of denial and indecisiveness. What he and El had was just... easy. Could they really be the same thing? God, why hadn’t he ever actually finished the book? It had been a book report and he’d just read the end of Dustin’s and tried to write something similar, his science fair project taking precedence over the love story.

But his thudding heart knew better and he pressed a sudden kiss to her temple as a sudden burst of happiness filled him. She squirmed, the affection unexpected, and sat up to face him, curling her legs underneath her as she looked down at him, expression curious. It was, admittedly, a newer thing. They liked to rest against each other but he didn’t kiss her as much as she would maybe like, always a bit cautious that someone would see.

“What?” she asked, her fingers brushing where he’d kissed her.

“Nothing, I just...” his chest was a cage of birds trying to flutter away, his mouth dry. “I’m glad I get to be around you, El. After last year it’s really...” he tried to think of a word that could describe how he was feeling but couldn’t, “...nice,” he finished lamely.

Her eyes softened despite his less than stellar vocabulary, a familiar look filling them before she leaned down and kissed him and he was sure his heart would explode because she was *right here* and she was

kissing him and she smelled like woodsmoke and flowers and her hair—which was so much longer now—tickled his cheeks as her nosed pressed against his. It was different for him, something *more* filling the space and he rested his on the back of her neck gently, keeping her there longer. He moved his lips against hers just slightly, following some inner instinct, and he felt her shift in surprise, not expecting it, but then doing the same thing, sighing into his mouth.

Her hand was on his cheek and he closed his eyes, feeling like it couldn't get better than this, that there was nothing more amazing than getting to be close to her. Getting to know she wanted to be there with him, everything about her soft and gentle and—

“Michael! Are you still going to the arcade?”

His mom's voice shouted from somewhere in the house, footsteps on the stairs, and El was suddenly against the footboard of his bed, her face pinking up as she remembered that what they were doing wasn't appropriate for parents and siblings to see. The footsteps were louder and his mom appeared in the doorway, looking at the two kids who were several feet apart, El's nose back in her book. She looked up at Karen and offered a small smile.

The older woman didn't seem to notice anything suspicious, staring at her son's red face with her eyebrows raised expectantly. He cleared his throat and looked away, shrugging.

“Um, I don't know, Mom,” Mike quickly answered, hoping his face wasn't as red as it felt. “I just told Nancy we haven't heard back from Will.”

“Oh, did she tell you she was giving you a ride if you go? I have to sew *tulle* and I'm losing my mind...”

“Yeah, because it's cold out,” Mike sighed, reaching down for the book he'd dropped on the floor earlier, that usual teenage I-want-to-be-left-alone feeling filling his voice. “I know, Mom. You didn't need to come up here and tell me when you had Nancy do it already.”

“I just don't want you to get frostbite, Michael, your nose could fall right off!”

El's eyes widened in alarm and she brushed her nose with her fingers, lowering her book.

"Fall... off?"

"No, El, not actually—Okay, Mom, I know. We won't bike. I promise," he grumped, annoyed that he would now have to convince El that her nose wouldn't fall off.

"Good," she glanced at the girl on her son's bed, eyes filling with motherly curiosity. "What are you two up to?"

Karen wasn't so naive to not have noticed the way her son looked at the girl... or how she looked back. She noticed how he acted and had realized the first day he'd brought over, with the rest of his friends, that she was special to him. She was new to Hawkins, the chief of police had adopted her over the summer and brought her to start school in the safe community. There were different rumors of where she had come from but all she'd managed to get out of Mike was that she'd come from a bad place and that the Chief had helped to rescue her. It seemed sweet enough and she was happy that her baby boy had found someone who appeared to adore him, even if the thought of another one of her children delving into teenage romance made her nervous.

They're the cutest little things, she sighed, in total denial that they could be anything but sweet and innocent.

"El's just reading for practice," Mike explained, looking around nervously. "Pride & Prejudice, um, and I'm reading the Hobbit again."

His mom smiled. "That's nice. I'm glad you can help her out. I know she had a late start, didn't you, El?"

"Um, yes," El agreed, nodding.

"Yeah..." he agreed too, wanting her to just leave.

He wasn't willing to incur her wrath by demanding she get out but it was awkward and he just wanted to cuddle back up with El for a bit longer. Part of his mind was still spinning, trying to comprehend this

revelation that had totally blown him off his feet. It was a good thing he had been sitting down.

“I’ll leave you two to your reading,” Karen smiled brightly, *finally* getting the hint.

“Th-Thanks, Mom.”

She was gone and the two relaxed, a small smile playing at El’s lips as she looked at him over her paperback, eyebrow raised at their close call.

His heart beat faster at her playful expression, his mouth gaping open as every word he could think of left his mind. It was true, it had to be, the feeling that was crashing over him like a tidal wave, knocking the air from his lungs with the impact.

Love? *Love* ? Holy shit, *love*.

Would it be weird to tell her? Did she even know what it would mean to say that word? She watched all those soap operas... which didn’t really count. Maybe she didn’t really know... she had been asking him all the questions about it. Was it because she didn’t know what it was or just because she hadn’t yet attached the word to feeling, like he had just now?

The only way to know would be to ask.

“El, um—” He started, feeling like his heart was going to pound out of his chest.

A voice barked, interrupting before he could even try to arrange his messy thoughts into something cohesive.

“Mike, do you copy?”

It was the Supercom, Will’s voice crackling through the static and El’s head snapped to look at it. She jumped off the bed and grabbed it for Mike, smiling excitedly before pressing the button.

“Will!”

“Oh, hi, El. Are you at Mike’s already?”

“Yes. We were waiting for you.”

“Sorry, my mom was sleeping and I didn’t want to wake her up but Jonathan wouldn’t take me until I asked her.”

“It’s okay. I was reading, *Pride and preju-mass*.”

“Prejudice?”

“Oh... yes.”

Mike felt his heart dive, swallowing the disappointment that filled his chest. Maybe it wasn’t the right time anyways. Some other time... when he could maybe get the words to come out right and he wouldn’t confess his love like a total dweeb.

He had logical mind. An intelligent one, hence the ever present label of “nerd” that followed him around his whole life. He could remember facts and equations and ideas and understand theories about parallel worlds and telekinesis and understand when something was bad or good. People often said, “You’re a smart kid, I’m sure you can figure it out”. And most of the time he did.

Setting the Hub on fire and distracting the Demo-dogs to help El last year had been his idea. He had helped set up the Bathtub in the gym and figured out that Will was the spy. He had known she was alive. Even after everyone else gave up and said it was impossible. He had *known*.

He was smart. But this was more than just neurons firing and synapses connecting, his memory recalling information more quickly and memorizing more easily. This was a feeling, something that started in his stomach and shivered up to his heart, his mind fuzzy as it focused on her soft smile, the way her hazel-green eyes sparkled happily.

Love.

“Anyways, my mom said it was okay. Did you call Dustin?” Will’s voice asked.

“He was waiting for you too.”

“Oh, I’ll call him then, let me switch channels.”

“Okay. Bye, Will.”

“Over and out.”

She walked back over to the bed and fell onto, the Supercom still in her hand, her book long forgotten for Will. The two had an oddly strong friendship for never having really met before last year. It had been tense at first, a misunderstanding keeping El from allowing herself to open to their youngest friend. That had been cleared up a few months ago and after that they’d become like brother and sister, since Hopper was in the habit of hanging out at the Byers’ and taking El with him. She’d always had a connection with Will that nobody—not even themselves—really understood. Maybe it was because she had been willing to sacrifice everything to help him, that she *had* sacrificed everything, just to get him out of the Upside Down. And he was the only one who truly knew the fear she had faced, of being hunted in a shadow world by a monster. It was like the trauma they had both faced alone now bonded them together.

Mike had asked her about it once, while he was at the cabin, both of them working on homework on her bed, textbooks strewn about. She’d been talking about the movie night they’d had with Joyce and Will and Jonathan, the latter two sitting on either side of her as they watched some movie about a bunch of kids searching for pirate treasure. After that she and Will had made a pirate map together in his room that was now hanging on her wall. A stray tickle of jealousy had made him wonder why she enjoyed spending so much time with Will and he’d asked outright.

“How come you and Will hang out all the time?”

“He understands,” she had shrugged easily.

“And I don’t?” he shot back, the insecurity making him snap.

El had noticed the tension in his shoulder, the harshness in his words, and knew what it was. They had discussed jealousy after an incident at school

between her and another girl—which was a whole other story. She had sensed it crackling behind his ebony eyes and immediately realized what he was thinking.

“Mike.”

She said his name in that soft way, the way she’d said it when they’d walked to Will’s through the woods so long ago—full of understanding. Her hand had made its way into his and squeezed as she leaned forward, eyes large, wanting to explain.

“He understands different. You... can’t,” she said simply. “But it’s okay because he doesn’t understand like you. You’re different. He’s like...”

Her explanation hadn’t made him feel better, the hurt look on his face making that apparent, and she squinted, trying to find a better way to make him understand her words. An example she knew he would get came to her and she brightened.

“I’m Leia,” she had pointed at herself. “Will?” She pointed vaguely away. “Is Luke. Like... a brother. Not someone I like... like you. But he understands different.”

Mike’s eyebrows had peaked, the truth of what Will mean to her dawning on him. They had the Force and he didn’t and he couldn’t understand that. But she didn’t like Will. Not like Leia liked Han.

Star Wars always seemed to make the most sense and the fact that she’d remembered the movies enough to be able to use it definitely made his heart flutter. The jealousy immediately faded, replaced by embarrassment that colored his face.

“Oh... okay. I just...” he ducked his head. “Sorry, El, I was being stupid. I’m glad you and Will are friends.” His brow furrowed in sudden thought. “Wait, so if you’re Leia, and he’s Luke, does that make me—”

“Han Solo,” she nodded confidently.

He’d kissed her so hard she’d had to push him away to take a breath, laughing loudly as he told her that she was the most awesome person in the entire galaxy and then kissed her face all over. That had been a good day, even though Hopper had stuck his head in—narrowly

missing the kissing—and gruffly told them to keep it down, ruining the moment.

Now he watched her look down at the Supercom, eyes concentrated, the static crackling before Will and Dustin's voices came out. They basically repeated the conversation she'd just had with Will and instead of waiting for him to radio back she butted into the conversation.

"So we're going?" She interrupted to the two other boys.

"Wha—"

"El, did you—"

Mike grinned, feeling the sun in his chest flare again as she laughed at their confusion and explained what she'd done. She was always surprising him—and their friends—and he couldn't imagine ever tiring of her smile and the way she said his name when she was happy. Or sad. Or sleepy.

"Mike, we go now."

She was in front of him and he blinked, looking up at her. Her sentences were still a bit... odd. She tended to cut out words she didn't think were necessary, a habit from only being allowed to say a few words at a time. Every now and then she would get out entire sentences and he would stare at her in surprise, never quite expecting the avalanche of words.

"Uh, yeah," he got up from where he was sitting. "I'll tell Nancy we need that ride now."

"Yes!"

He left his room, smiling at her excitement. Much to his delight—and all of their friends, actually—she loved going to the arcade. They only let her play certain games after she accidentally fried Centipede with her mind—high stress kind of made her freak out—but she loved to even just watch and soon was bankrupting Hop for every quarter he owned and going with them after school and on weekends if she could get a ride.

She was seriously perfect and he was starting to come to terms with this whole “love” thing he was feeling. It made sense and he wondered why he hadn’t realized it before.

His fist tapped on Nancy’s door and he heard her say “come in”, opening the door and quickly shutting it, watching his sister’s face go from blank to confused. He usually left it open.

“Did you need—”

“How do you know for sure you love someone?” he blurted, then immediately turned red.

I did not just ask her that. Oh shit. Oh my god, no, no no no no—

“That’s a heavy question.” Nancy had been laying on her stomach on her bed but sat up, her face serious instead of teasing like he’d expected. “Why are you asking me?”

“Because I can’t ask *Mom*,” he rolled his eyes. “I don’t know, we’re supposed to tell each other things so can you just tell me this? Then we can go back to never talking again.”

“We used to talk, Mike. Before she came back.”

That was sort of true. They’d both lost someone, though Mike had never given up hope, but it was still a heavy burden. Nancy heard him sniffing one night, creeping into his room silently and closing the door. Neither of them had said anything—what was there to say? —but she’d sat next to him, seeing the Supercom clutched in his hands, and nodded silently, tears filling her own eyes.

He never forgot that. It had been day one hundred and fifty-four, one of the days he’d felt completely hopeless, and after that they’d talked a bit more, late at night when she would come into his room. She talked about Barb, the guilt she felt about not being able to tell the truth, and he told her El’s entire story, everything he knew. It had been good to share, but after their grievances had been quieted last fall, they stopped talking as much.

“Sorry, I’m busy now,” he huffed. “It’s not like you talk to me either. You’re always hanging out with Jonathan.”

“That’s fair.” She winced at the sting of his words.

“Just... can you answer my question or not?”

He squirmed impatiently and she sighed.

“It’s not... I don’t even know, Mike. Love is weird. It doesn’t make sense—”

“So you don’t love Jonathan?”

She frowned. “I didn’t *say* that—”

“But you didn’t love Steve, right?” he butted in again.

His sister frowned sourly, not liking how the conversation was going.

“Look, I said it’s not easy, okay? Sometimes you can think you love someone but you just... you don’t. It’s shitty, it sucks, and you hurt people,” she sighed, shoulders drooping. “And even if it’s not what you meant to happen... it *is* what happened and you have to apologize and try to live with it. So you try and be more careful next time.”

That made a weird amount of sense and Mike nodded. He only knew about Steve’s heartbreak because Steve had told Dustin—how they had become friends, Mike still didn’t understand—and Dustin had accidentally told everyone. Mike didn’t care to know so much about his sister’s love life but he hadn’t been given a choice and clearly she wasn’t a fan of him knowing either. But he could understand.

“What if it’s just like... like everything about them makes you happy? Like you can imagine them always being there no matter what. And you *want* them to be there, because them not being there is worst thing ever,” he leaned against the door, looking at the carpet. “Like you’re sure if you lost them you’d just stop... everything.”

“Wow, Mike, is that how you feel about El?” Nancy’s eyes were wide.

“No! I’m just... this is hypothetical, okay? It’s a general question, don’t try and—”

“Okay, fine. Hypothetically,” she agreed, nodding to try and hide the smugness that twitched her lips. “In a hypothetical sense, that kind of sounds like it could be love. I mean... at least one kind of it.”

He bit his lip, bobbing his head agreeably, feeling awkward but also a bit relieved. If his sister thought so... it was probably true. She was pretty smart, after all.

“Okay. Cool. Thanks, Nancy.” He opened the door and turned to leave before remembering the reason he had come in the first place. “Oh, we need a ride to the arcade now.”

“Alright, give me five minutes to finish this note card and we can go.”

He left, returning to El, who was tucking her book back into her backpack, sitting on the floor with the Supercom still next to her. At his arrival she looked up, the usual happy smile on her face.

“They’re leaving soon,” she informed him.

“We are too, Nancy’s just finishing something,” he told her, putting his own book back onto his bookshelf so his mom couldn’t argue he’d made a mess.

When he turned around El was sitting in his bed again, the skirt of her wool dress clinging to the heavy grey tights she was wearing. He’d kind of noticed how when he went to visit her she was usually wearing overalls and oversized plaid shirts, but when she would come over she always looked nice... in a dress or something. She always looked really nice. He didn’t think she could look *not* nice.

His throat felt dry and he swallowed heavily, walking toward her and feeling his heart start to pound against his ribs. Okay, he totally just needed to say it, just get it out there. Admit it. Confess it. Nothing to lose... he’d literally already watched her get taken to another dimension by an evil interdimensional monster. This should be easy... right?

There wasn’t any good reason to hide it. He’d had fears in the past that she would disappear again or that she would find someone she

liked better than him. But his confidence was built up with each day, each time she reached for his hand during a movie or rested her head on his shoulder or paused and kissed him, pulling away with soft eyes and a smile.

God, she was *everything* She deserved to know.

“El, I—”

“Quarters?” She perked up. “I brought some for you too.”

He blinked. “Oh, yeah, that’s awesome thanks, um, but—”

“Is Nancy taking us now?”

She was eager and she didn’t know he was trying to confess his undying love for her and it would have pissed him off if she wasn’t so cute and excited.

“Yeah, in a minute.” He walked towards her and sat down as she scooted to make room. “Look, I kind of—”

Nancy appeared in the doorway, looking expectant. Mike swore internally. Why couldn’t he just have five minutes?

“You ready to go?”

“Yeah, uh—” He blinked dumbly but El started to jump off the bed. He grabbed her arm before she could go too far and gave Nancy a look that said ‘Please be a cool older sister for like ten more minutes and leave us alone’. She got the hint.

“Um, actually, I’m going to grab my coat and boots. Five minutes, front door?” She quirked a brow.

“Yeah, thanks, Nance.”

She was gone and El was giving him a look, confused as to why he wasn’t running down the stairs to get to the arcade as quickly as possible. Her eyes glanced down to where his hand was holding her wrist but she eased back onto the bed, tilting her head. He had something to say, she could tell.

“Mike?”

Her voice was soft, that understanding tone that had made him fall so hard for her in the first place. She always just *knew* and it was such a relief, not having to try and explain *everything*, or at least... not the things that mattered.

His heart was racing, palms sweaty, and he took a deep breath, trying to steel himself for the moment. It had to be perfect and sweet and amazing and—

“El, I think I love you,” he blurted. His face flushed and his eyes widened in shock at what had come out of his own mouth. Could he have said it *worse*? “Shit, no, I mean, I *know* I do but, I just... I didn’t think about it and—”

“Mike.” Her hands were on his face and she was scooting closer to him, smiling that small, soft smile. “I know.”

He felt his heart stop.

“You *do*?!” It was a squeak and he winced. “I-I mean... what?”

“I love you too. I told you. You’re Han and I’m Leia,” she shrugged like it was the most obvious thing in the world, quoting Star Wars again to try and help him understand. “‘I love you’. ‘I know’.” Her brow furrowed in thought. “Maybe I’m Han Solo...”

“I... I’m...”

He was speechless, trying to stutter out a response, staring at her with huge eyes, seeing the amusement and happiness glowing in her eyes. She had said that but he’d just assumed she didn’t really know the whole story of it—He shook his head. She was so much smarter than he gave her credit for sometimes.

He licked his lips and finally found words. “But you’ve never... said it before?” It was accidentally a question and she shrugged again.

“I thought you knew.” A thought hit her and she frowned, looking concerned. “Did you... not love me?”

“No!” The word burst out of him. “No, I... I always have I just didn’t... realize it. Or like, I didn’t know it was *that*...” He was blushing again despite how casual she was about it. There was no reason for her to think it was a big deal. “S-Sorry. I’m not good at this.”

“It’s okay. I love you anyways.”

The way she said it made his chest light up and he felt a grin stretch across his face, suddenly reaching for her and pulling closer to him, into his lap. His heart was on fire and suddenly nothing mattered but being near her and knowing that she loved him as much as he loved her.

Their lips met and it was a sigh, her hands moving up to wrap around his neck, pulling him down to her. His newfound height was a minor obstacle and he gladly stooped down, gathering her in his arms and pressing her against his chest, wanting her to feel the way his heart beat for her.

It was everything, she was *everything* . Everything he’d waited for, everything he’d wanted. Her existence had been a supernova in his life, changing everything he thought he’d knew and making it better. All the longing and missing and hurting had been worth it because now she was sitting in his lap and kissing him like there was nothing she wanted more and she *loved* him.

She loved him.

They broke apart with a gasp and she was smiling up at him, looking slightly dazed at how intense the kiss had been. Something new. Something she liked.

“I love you,” she whispered again, hands pulling him back to her lips. “I love you, Mike.”

“El—”

It was a gasp and then they were kissing each other and he didn’t want to do anything else, go anywhere else or be anything else that would ever keep him from this. He was meant to be with her, nothing

had ever felt more certain. His hands were on her waist, bringing her up to him and she was smiling against his mouth as he fell back onto his bed.

The sunshine teased through the strands of her curly hair as she looked down at him, lighting up her face, and he grinned up at her. Totally perfect.

"I love you," he said again, shivering at the new phrase. The most right thing he'd ever said in his entire life.

"I love you."

They said it back and forth and she laughed merrily both drunk on the moment and the feeling and the newness of it all. He reached for her, wanting to feel her lips again and she moved to him like it was the most natural thing. It was perfect, heaven, complete bliss.

Nothing could ruin the moment.

"Mike! El!" Nancy's voice was like nails on a chalkboard. "I'm ready!"

They sat up with a gasp, but there were no footsteps on the stairs and they relaxed. Mike felt like pouting, suddenly wanting to skip the arcade and keep doing what they were doing instead. Getting lost in her was so easy, her lips were soft and sweet and the way she looked at him with half-lidded eyes was better than any high score. And this new kissing thing was *amazing*.

"Michael!" The only thing scarier than his mom using his full name was his sister. "I'm getting tired of waiting... come on!"

"C-Coming!" He squawked, reluctantly scooting back from El.

She looked equally disappointed but nodded, knowing they shouldn't make his sister wait. They both stood up slowly and he felt the warmth in his chest fire back up and she walked to him and fell against him, wrapping her arms tight around his chest and snuggling her face into his neck. He was getting taller everyday and now her head fit perfectly under his chin and it felt totally perfect.

"We should go," he sighed. "We told them we'd go."

"I'd rather stay here with you," she whispered back.

He paused, wondering if they should just cancel...

"But we go. It's okay," she conceded. "We can come back after and kiss more."

"Sounds good to me." He tried to be casual but couldn't keep from smiling and she rolled her eyes as she headed for the door, looking at him over her shoulder as he followed her.

"Mike!" Nancy was sounding genuinely annoyed.

"We're coming!" He yelled back.

Before El made it to the end of the hall, he snagged her wrist, pulling her back to him and to his lips in a single, smooth move. She sighed happily and rested her hands on his chest, letting him kiss her and then grinning and pulling back. Her head leaned forward and she rested her forehead against his chin, feeling him press a kiss there too. His fingers tangled through her hair and tucked a strand behind her ear and it felt so quiet and intimate and perfect. Like dancing with her at the Snow Ball or holding her hand as they watched a movie. Just them.

"Okay, Nancy's waiting," he sighed.

"I know."

She grabbed his hand firmly and stepped back, tugging him towards the stairs and smiling at him, looking like a pure sunshine. His heart swelled.

"El, I love you," he repeated. He would never get tired of it.

Her smile burned brighter and she tilted her head. "I love you too, Mike."

His feet shuffled after her as she lead him towards their destination and he felt something in him sigh happily, knowing there would never be a day he didn't follow her wherever she wanted to go.

Together.

Author's Note:

i'm still working on don't make me say goodbye. it's honestly mostly trash and i get stressed when i look at it but i'm chipping away.

i miss you all. hope to see you soon.

-g